

222 SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

Grisou" (" Firedamp "), by M. Maurice Talmeyre —a story which likewise dealt with the coalpits of northern France, and which when published a few years previously had attracted some attention, being full of interest and written with literary ability. But the idea that Zola had stolen his idea of " Germinal" from it was ridiculous. It had been pointed out long since by Alexis that he proposed to add a second volume on the masses to the study he had made of them in " L'Assommoir," intending on the second occasion to deal more particularly with their social and political aspirations. That intention was partially carried into effect in " Germinal/" and the idea of laying the scene of his story in the " black country" of northern France was a sudden inspiration which came to Zola when he found it difficult to proceed immediately with his proposed work on some of the French peasantry — an inspiration which was not derived from M. Talmeyre's book at all, but from the circumstance that some thousands of pitmen were on strike at that very time.

Surely no author can claim a monopoly of any subject or any locality. One writer, for instance, may lay a scene in Eegent Street; another is equally entitled to do so; and in the result there may well be some

resemblance between their descriptions of the thoroughfare. Moreover, in giving an account of any form of life, all writers are confronted by the same essential facts. They may regard them, interpret them, differently, but each must take them into account. Thus if somewhat similar scenes and corresponding facts figure occasionally in "Le Grisou" and "Germinal" it does not follow that the second is stolen from the first. But Zola, unfortunately, was a much-hated